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Drought Sharpens West Bank Water Dispute

Drought conditions this summer will complicate negotiations over the control and allocation of the diminishing West Bank freshwater supply. Current water use—even under normal rainfall conditions—is 50-200 million cubic meters (mcm) beyond the recharge capacities of the aquifers in the West Bank and Israel.

- The water shortfall of some 300 mcm has placed the West Bank aquifers at risk for saltwater infiltration.
- Press reports, citing sources in the Israeli Water Ministry, say the water level in the western aquifer is dropping by 1 meter per month and is expected to reach its “red line”—the level at which it is in danger of saltwater contamination—by September.

Anticipating that Israel will refuse to relinquish control of West Bank water, the Palestinians are likely to demand enough water to bring their per capita consumption levels up to Israeli levels.

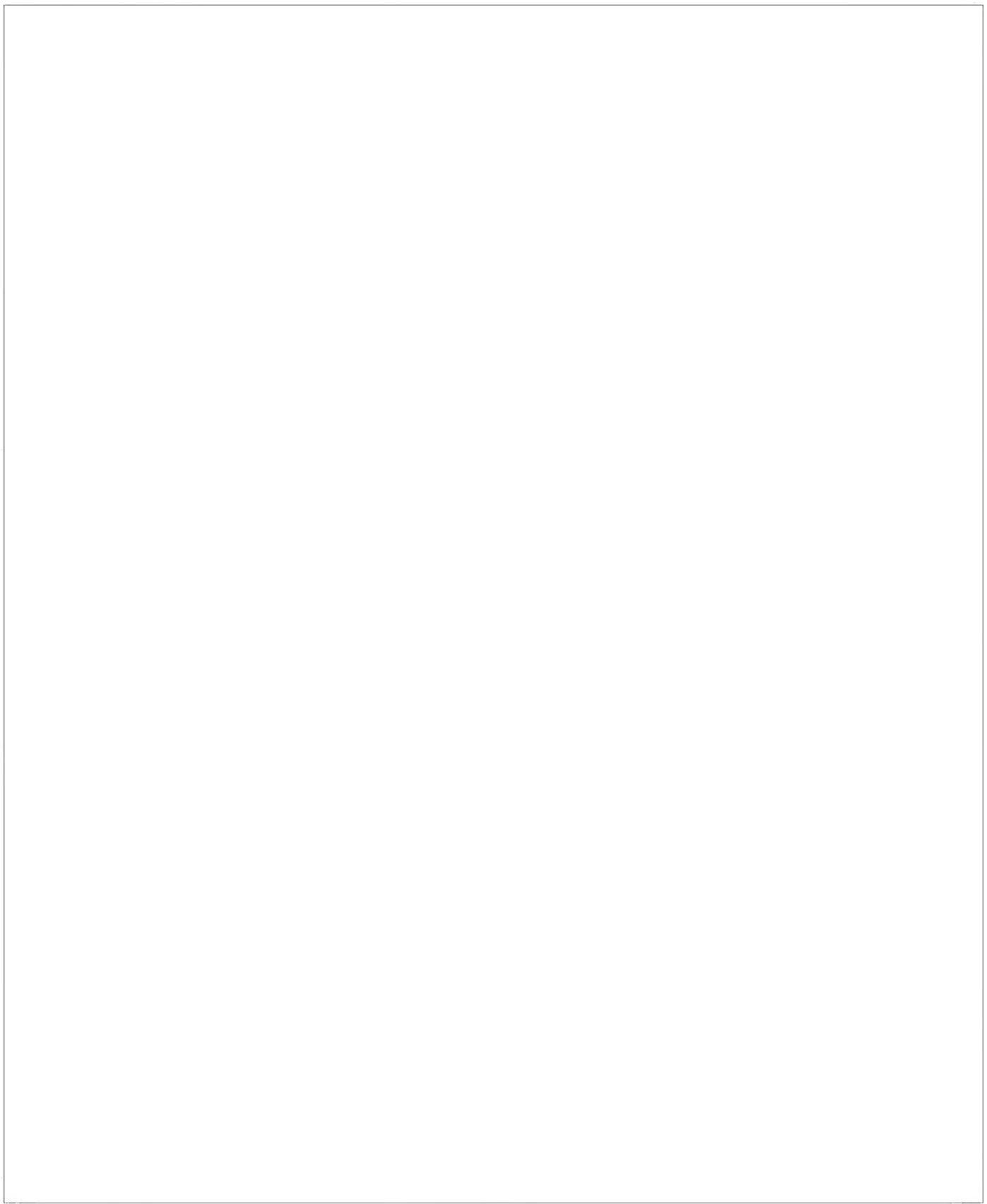
The Palestinians use about 80 cubic meters annually per capita as compared with the Israelis, who consume 100 cubic meters for household use and 300 cubic meters overall—the measure when agricultural consumption is included.

- To match Israeli levels, the Palestinians would need between 300 and 900 mcm annually—well beyond the capacity of the West Bank aquifers

About 500 Palestinians for several hours on 17 July blocked the primary route from Bethlehem to Hebron, according to press reports. They were protesting what they perceive to be excessive water consumption by West Bank settlers and Israel's refusal to allow them to drill new wells in the West Bank.

Water control and access is one of five interrelated issues to be settled in permanent status discussions between the Israelis and Palestinians. The others are the establishment of permanent borders between Israel and the developing Palestinian entity, the future of Israeli settlements and Palestinian refugees, and the status of Jerusalem.

- *The borders issue will determine the size of the territory to be under Palestinian control, which—in combination with the water resources the Palestinians eventually will control—will help determine the number of returning refugees the Palestinian Authority can accommodate.*
- *Resolution of the water dispute will have to include provisions for the creation of additional freshwater sources through recycling or desalination.*



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Egypt Cooperating on Nile Issues

Foreign Minister Moussa last week told journalists that Egypt and Ethiopia are close to an understanding on Nile water and that Cairo has reached similar cooperation agreements with other Nile Basin states. The ministerial council of 10 Nile Basin countries, which met in May—along with the tripartite committee that Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia formed at that meeting—is providing the framework for cooperation.

- Cairo will not allow construction of dams on the Nile without the council's agreement, according to press reports.
- Egypt does not object to current Ethiopian water projects, which consist almost exclusively of microdams.

Egypt's increasing water needs make future disputes inevitable despite the trend toward regional cooperation. If fully implemented, Cairo's planned land reclamation projects, including the South Valley Development Project, will require an additional 15.5 billion cubic meters (bcm's) of water per year on top of the 67 bcm's Egypt now uses—a rise in usage that will strain Egypt's relations with upstream nations.

- Internal political and economic dislocations in Sudan and Ethiopia prevent them from using Nile water to its fullest extent, but improvements could allow these countries to increase water use for long-planned irrigation projects.

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Russian Drought Threatens Grain Harvest

Russia may increase its imports of grain and again request assistance from the West because of drought, a severe late-spring freeze, and low grain stocks. Russian agricultural specialists have reduced their estimate for the grain harvest this year from 70 million metric tons to 50-55 million tons, slightly above the record low of 48 million tons last year.

- Premier Stepashin has predicted the harvest will be at least 60 million tons, but official midyear forecasts typically overestimate the final harvest by 10 to 20 percent

Wheat output may fall more than 3 million tons short of demand, and wheat diverted from feed to grain-based foods for the Russian population will further damage the livestock industry. Recent scattered rains have helped, but the outlook for the harvest could worsen if the drought continues.

- Russian grain reserves have been drawn down to less than 6.5 million tons—down more than 60 percent from the same time last year and are equivalent to less than five weeks of domestic consumption, according to official Russian statistics.

The EU and US already have delivered more than half of the \$1.5 billion worth of food aid promised earlier this year. The almost 4 million tons of grain included in the package will help boost stocks until the harvest.

Unless the grain outlook improves, Russia will have to rely on grain imports and barter deals to meet consumption needs next spring and summer. Moscow this year hopes to obtain an estimated 2 million tons of grain in barter deals with usual partners in exchange for energy, raw materials, and military technology.

- Hungary has offered to provide as much as \$350 million worth of grain and food for energy supplies.

Russian Agriculture Minister Shcherbak has said the government has no plans to request additional grain imports or food assistance but will compensate losses in southern European Russia with grain shipments from other regions. Other officials, however, have said Russia again will need food assistance from the West, according to press reports.

- The government, as in the past, may seek credits to buy wheat from the US to cover any deficit.

Reduced grain supplies will mean higher prices and continuing hardships for Russian consumers, especially for the more than 38 percent of the population below the poverty line. Some regional leaders, as they did last year, may try to protect their constituents by imposing controls on food prices and distribution, which would exacerbate food shortages in regions that depend on outside supplies.

Russia: Precipitation, June 1999



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Russia Investigating Handling of Environmental “Secrets”

The Federal Security Service (FSB) in July investigated a US citizen and a renowned Russian scientist in connection with “secret” information on Russia’s environment, according to Russian media. Media reports say the FSB in the southern city of Voronezh early in July deported a US citizen for allegedly passing unspecified scientific documents to the CIA and for seeking environmental information about the heavily polluted Voronezh region.

In the case of another environmental whistleblower, a Vladivostok court on 20 July convicted journalist Grigoriy Pasko of “improper military conduct” and gave him a three-year suspended sentence but ruled that the charge of treason against him was unfounded. Pasko’s attorneys have vowed to sue the police for their client’s treatment, according to Russian media. Pasko’s qualified court victory is a blow to the FSB and military prosecutors, but we have seen no sign Russian authorities will abandon efforts to convict other environmental whistle-blowers.

In a separate case, the FSB in Vladivostok last week searched the office and residence of Vladimir Soyfer, a laboratory chief at the Russian Academy of Sciences Far East Pacific Oceanographical Institute, and confiscated “secret” documents, according to Russian media. His security clearances and passport were voided, but he has not yet been arrested.

Meanwhile, the FSB continues to lead the charge in accusing high-profile environmental whistleblower Aleksandr Nikitin—who coauthored a published report four years ago on radiation hazards in the Northern Fleet—of treason based on Defense Ministry secrecy decrees issued after his arrest. The FSB early this month charged Nikitin with espionage for the ninth time, and FSB chief Putin told Russian media that he is confident that Nikitin eventually will be convicted.

— Russian military prosecutors in mid-July informed Nikitin that their court-ordered reinvestigation into the charges against him affirmed his guilt.

FSB Motivations

Soyfer’s research has included monitoring radioactive contamination of the Sea of Japan from Russian fleet activities. According to one media report, Soyfer had a thorny relationship with the Pacific Fleet commander because of his research.

Another factor in the Soyfer investigation may be his brother Valeriy, a geneticist and outspoken critic of Soviet and Russian environmental policies. Since he emigrated to the US several years ago, Russian media have criticized him for his advice to a major US foundation on its provision of health care and scientific and environmental assistance to Russia.

Gold Rush in Russia's Kuril Islands

Nature Reserve

A Russian environmental newsletter says 2 tons of explosives were delivered this year to Kunashir Island—the southernmost of the Kuril Islands—to speed excavation of an open pit gold mine within the buffer zone of the Kurilsky Nature Reserve. The nature reserve was established in 1984 to protect the diverse wildlife and pristine ecosystem on Kunashir Island.

Expansion of the mining activity will inflame conflict with the central government because residents say the local government is powerless to reverse decisions made on mainland Russia. Residents are seeking help from environmental groups to stop the destruction caused by the mining.

- They are concerned that the Kuril Islands will be exploited before Russia and Japan move to transfer the islands back to Japan.

- Press reports say the ore will be transported to a proposed processing plant—also in the nature reserve's buffer zone—where a sodium cyanide leaching process will be used to extract the gold. Use of sodium cyanide is prohibited in the zone because of the severe or permanent damage it can cause to the ecosystem.

The Kurile Mining and Geological Company, which according to press reports has had a poor environmental record, received approval for exploratory work from Sakhalin environmental authorities by submitting only the portions of the project that would be the least controversial. According to the environmental newsletter, the sole dissenting vote came from the director of the Kurilsky Nature Reserve.



Tough Road Ahead for New South Korean Environment Minister

Dr. Kim Myong cha's recent appointment has renewed hope among environmentalists that President Kim is serious about environmental concerns, according to media reports, but Dr. Kim will have little scope to implement major new environmental initiatives in a government focused on economic restructuring. Her Ministry lacks influence in the administration, the Office of the Prime Minister coordinates environmental policy, and other ministries can veto environmental projects by claiming economic impact on their areas of responsibility

On the positive side, one of her predecessors, Minister Ch'oe Chae-uk, was instrumental in organizing the first-ever meeting between environment ministers of South Korea, Japan, and China last January. The meeting led to agreement to strengthen cooperation in pollution prevention, in protection of the marine environment, and in developing environmental technology, according to press reports

Kim, taking her first government position, is a chemistry professor and former Dean of the College of Science at Suk-Myong Women's University. As a leading member of the Citizens' Coalition for Economic Justice, she has been a member of the President's unification advisory council since last year.

South Korean environmental officials generally back US initiatives and are key partners in supporting multilateral climate change initiatives. South Korea, which imports about 97 percent of its energy needs, favors programs promoting fuel efficiency and technological innovation.

Dr. Kim is the third environment minister since February 1997.

- One of South Korea's largest environmental organizations says 68 percent of the public is dissatisfied with President Kim's environmental policies.
- The President recently approved construction on protected park land in various regions around the country and exempted the landowners from environmental impact reviews despite opposition from environmental groups and public protests.

In Brief

Dam gets help from abroad

Beijing for the first time has contracted with foreign firms—Electricite de France and the French Technical Supervision Bureau—to monitor 17 Chinese plants manufacturing generators for the Three Gorges Dam, according to a Chinese press report.

Selected International Environment-Related Meetings

30 August	Basel Convention Ad Hoc Working Group on Liability	Geneva
6-11 September	Third Session of the POPs Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee	Geneva
9-13 September	APEC Senior Officials Meeting	Auckland
4-8 October	Biodiversity Convention Expert Panel on Access and Benefit Sharing	Montreal
25 October-5 November	Fifth Session of the Conference of Parties to the Climate Change Convention	Bonn
15-26 November	Third Session of the Conference of Parties to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification	Recife
30 November-3 December	WTO Ministerial	Seattle
6-10 December	Fifth Conference of Parties to the Basel Convention	Basel
10-16 December	Sixth International Conference on Acid Rain Deposition	Tsukuba, Japan
31-January-4 February 2000	Subsidiary Body for Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice to the Biodiversity Convention	Montreal